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FROM A PHILOSOPHICALLY CLEAN-SHAVEN MARX TO A PHILOSOPHICALLY DECOLONIZED DELEUZE

PHILOFICTION DARK DELEUZE, DELEUZE, DELEUZE/GUATTARI, MARXISM, NON-PHILOSOPHY

[This is a really rough outline/introductory sketch for the third chapter of my dissertation, which takes up the relationship between the persisting residual eurocentrism in specific interpretations of D&G's political project, and how D&G themselves constructed a framework by which to eradicate its lasting traces in both thinking and revolutionary politics]

If the face is in fact Christ, in other words, your average ordinary White Man, then the first deviances, the first divergence-types, are racial: yellow man, black man, men in the second or third category...They must be Christianized, in other words, facialized. European racism as the white man's claim has never operated by exclusion, or by the designation of someone as Other...Racism operates by the determination of degrees of deviance in relation to the White-Man face, which endeavors to integrate nonconforming traits into increasingly eccentric and backward waves, sometimes tolerating them at given places under given conditions, in a given ghetto, sometimes erasing them from the wall, which never abides alterity (it's a Jew, it's an Arab, it's a Negro, it's a lunatic...). From the viewpoint of racism, there is no exterior, there are no people on the outside. There are only people who should be like us and whose crime it is not to be...Racism never detects the particles of the other; it propagates waves of sameness until those who resist identification have been wiped out...Its cruelty is equaled only by its incompetence and naivete.

– Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 178

Introduction

In the *Preface* to the French edition of *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze puts forward the following observation regarding the labor of philosophy as the reproduction of its history:

It seems to us that the history of philosophy should play a role roughly analogous to that of *collage* in painting. The history of philosophy is the reproduction of philosophy itself. In the history of philosophy, a commentary should act as a veritable double and bear the maximal modification appropriate to a double. (One images a *philosophically* bearded Hegel, a *philosophically* clean-shaven Marx, in the same way as a moustached Mona Lisa).

(Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, xxi)

If philosophy was supposed to be closer to *collage* and Duchamp than some faithful yet mechanical retelling of its history—a way of doing philosophy that produces novel contributions in thought but in the guise of slight modification; that encourages us to imagine, in philosophy, a Marx *sans* beard—what does it mean to engage, philosophically, with the political project inaugurated by Deleuze and Guattari's *Capitalism & Schizophrenia*? The thesis we will put forward, as the opening move toward answering this question, is the following: if it was imperative we understand Marx's relationship to the history of philosophy as an icon stripped of its most distinguishing features, it is just as imperative for us to imagine a *philosophically decolonized* Deleuze. This chapter aims at demonstrating what it meant by a 'philosophically decolonized' Deleuzianism as well as providing the determinate content that gives a decolonial Deleuze its *historical, material*, and therefore *real* content.

First, we will proceed by reconsidering particularly significant interpretations of *the relationship between philosophy and revolutionary politics* as envisioned by Deleuze and Guattari. After which we will then demonstrate how D&G's privileging of concepts such as the Particular, the minor, and minority, is constitutive of their attempt to think through, and against, the processes of racialization ushered in by European colonialism. This will be seen in this chapter's final section that argues for the logical and political solidarity between D&G's notion of revolutionary politics and the tradition of decolonial philosophy (e.g., Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, George Ciccariello-Maher). It is only by making this link between D&G and the decolonial project that we will be in a position to judge the virtues and limitations of D&G joint writings.

However, as a point of clarification with regards to the first section of this chapter, we use the term 'revolutionary' here in order to express Deleuze and Guattari's commitment to the abolition of any/all structures of organizing society predicated upon the unfreedom, subjugation, alienation, or exploitation of a portion of the global population for the freedoms of the rest. While the literature regarding this topic is ever expanding, we will confine our analysis to two general interpretations of Deleuze and Guattari's particular fusion of philosophical and political practice. On the one hand, there are those who view philosophy's relationship to politics as one of providing a theoretical framework that gives clarity and coherence to the *virtual potentials that are not actualized within a certain historical milieu and state of affairs*. This position is best articulated by Eugene Holland who offers the following formulation:

Philosophy...turns away from the actuality in order to *give consistency* to virtuality by extracting from actual states of affairs the selected determinations constitutive of and mapped by its concepts. Philosophy concepts do not refer to the actual states of affairs...but rather give consistency to the virtuality from which those states of affairs arose or were actualized. Philosophy thus counter-actualizes actuality and re-potentiates virtuality, restoring the latter's motility and, perhaps most importantly, its potential to be actualized differently...Where science captures or traces reality itself...philosophy maps the virtual, or rather maps diverse sections of virtuality on its various planes of immanence. (Holland, 'The Utopian Dimension of Thought in Deleuze and Guattari', 23)

On the other hand, there are those who read Deleuze and Guattari's revolutionary aspirations by placing emphasis on their concepts of the minor/minoritarian subject, becoming-indiscernible, lines of flight, deterritorialization, and nomadic war machines. Scholars who maintain this position include Nicholas Thoburn, Guillaume Sibertin-Blanc, and Edoard Glissant. In contrast to Holland's reading, Thoburn, Culp, and Glissant view the relationship between philosophy and politics as not simply the task of counter-actualizing potentials within the present that remain unactualized.

Now, while Holland's reading remains true regarding the *letter* of Deleuze's thought, through our exegesis of Thoburn and Glissant we are given the additional, if not more important insight, that, for Deleuze and Guattari, this task of counter-actualizing the virtual must be put in the service of a particular kind of subjectivity, or particular kind of identity constituted by late capitalism. To restrict oneself to the activity of *counter-actualization* that gives theoretical consistency to the virtual, is to ignore the other-half of the function Deleuze assigns to Thinking as such. For as we saw in the previous chapter, Thinking not only adheres to the tripartite criteria of the determination of the Idea; thinking synthetically produces Ideas whose purpose is the identification of certain objective tendencies of a Problem/problematic field, and whose content is that of an actual process that carries within it latent virtual potentials for transforming the Problem/problematic field *in toto*. It was this dual feature of constructing a consistent virtual Idea with an emphasis on its singular points (lines of flight) that Deleuze meant by asserting the two-faces of every Idea:

It is as though every Idea has two faces, which are like love and anger: love in the search for fragments, the progressive determination and linking of the ideal adjoint fields; anger in the condensation of singularities which, by dint of ideal events, defines the concentration of a 'revolutionary situation' and causes the Idea to explode into the actual. It is in this sense that Lenin had Ideas. (*Difference and Repetition*, 190)

In order to avoid a one-sided understanding of Deleuze and Guattari's political project (as embodied in Holland's position), Nicholas Thoburn's work is useful insofar as it emphasizes the role the minor/minoritarian while Edoard Glissant himself does this by emphasizing the importance of thinking emancipation from within his own context of the Caribbean. From this brief comparison, we already see how it is that the salient difference separating Holland from thinkers like Thoburn and Glissant is best summarized by Holland himself when he writes

In line with Deleuze & Guattari, his hopes clearly lie in the prospects for more equitable and mutually beneficial

forms of market exchange. *Unlike Deleuze & Guattari, however, Glissant projects a strong sense of writing from and about a particular place in the world, rather than about the world as a whole.* For he speaks and thinks both *from* and *of* an archipelago: a region with no single standard or measure of identity, but plural sources, influences, relations; a region without a single People or State, but with multiple ties, parallel histories, shared interests; a region where subterranean or rather sub-oceanic links count for more than politically enclosed territorial boundaries. (Holland, 6)

According to Holland, then, what distinguishes Glissant from Deleuze and Guattari is the formers localized and situated political project. To be clear, it is possible for one to find support for this criticism of Glissant's reading of Deleuze and Guattari, and particularly with respect to the filmed interview between Claire Parnet and Deleuze at the end of his life. When the discussion turns to the topic of Deleuze's relationship to the Left, leftist politics, and unlike many of his contemporaries, his non-participation in the French Communist Party, Deleuze begins to define what it means to be 'from the Left' in a manner that seemingly corroborates Holland's concern:

To not be from the left means starting with myself, my street, my city, my country, the other countries further and further. We start by us, and as we are privileged, we live in a rich country, we wonder what we can do to sustain in time this situation. We can feel that there are some dangers, that this situation can't last too long. So we say "Oh but the Chinese are so far away, what can we do so that Europe can sustain itself in time etc. To be from the left is the opposite. It is to perceive, as it is said that Japanese people perceive..They would say: The world, the Continent, Europe, France, etc. etc. the rue Bizerte, me. It is a phenomenon of perception. This way we first perceive the horizon..In fact, *to be from the left is to know that the Third World's issues are closer to us than our neighborhood's issues.* (Deleuze & Parnet, *L'Abécédaire*, G comme gauche)

However, against Holland's fidelity to the letter of Deleuze's work, his criticism of Glissant finds itself absent of any justification in for two main reasons. **First**, insofar as being part of the Left means affirming the priority of 'Third World' issues viz-à-viz issues that arise in rich countries whose citizens find themselves in a privileged position, faulting Glissant for 'writing from a particular place rather than about the world as a whole' actually amounts to criticizing Glissant for giving priority to his position of theorizing from within a 'Third World' country. Less a form of localism or provincialism in theory, we would say, against Holland, that what appears to be nothing but the limited scope of Glissant's thought is in fact the very act that Deleuze claims includes one's activity on the side of 'the Left' properly understood.

Second, it should strike readers as odd for Holland to claim that a thinker who attempts to construct a politics founded upon a terrain that lacks 'standard or measure of a unified identity'; a politics that jettisons the ideal of 'a single People or State'; is in some meaningful sense opposed to Deleuze and Guattari's own political proscriptions. We need only remind ourselves that Deleuze and Guattari's criticism of the concept of 'the people' isn't simply based upon a generalized suspicion of any and all political categories. Rather, it is because, historically 'a people can only be created in abominable sufferings.' While it is the case that Deleuze and Guattari conceive of philosophy as capable of signaling a 'people to come', it is always qualified in the following terms: "*The race summoned forth by art or philosophy is not the one that claims to be pure but rather an oppressed, bastard, lower, anarchical, nomadic, and irremediable minor race.*" Thus, it is with regard to the question of a single People constituted by the presence or absence of a measure of identity, that these two contrasting readings of Deleuze and Guattari will be delineated.

In the latter half of this chapter we will argue that just as Deleuze's early works went to great lengths to critique what he called the Dogmatic Image of Thought, his work with Guattari aims to demonstrate the practical futility of ready-made political ideas such as 'the people', or the inherited virtues from the Enlightenment such as European humanism's alleged 'universality'. While a critique of humanism and universalism may seem to contradict any commitment to revolutionary politics, we will show how it is precisely because these Enlightenment values were never universally applicable to begin with that Deleuze and Guattari will privilege a minoritarian conception of revolutionary subjectivity; a subject whose political activity begins and remains inseparable from the localized ways they find themselves stratifications, organized, and subjectified by capital and its State.

So.. while Holland's interpretation remains valuable, it is a reading that ignores the minoritarian dimension of Deleuze and Guattari's political position (Thoburn), as well as implicitly repeats the eurocentric bias of treating 'particular' or 'local' struggles and groups therein as needing to be subsumed into a more universal political category. What readings such as Holland's neglects is the fact that it is precisely because history has denied particular groups inclusion into the universal that it is in the interest of these particular identity groups to propose a vision of the Universal that does not seek to establish substantial identity between model and copy, idea and claimant (Glissant). Thus, against the charge that would find us guilty for grounding a theory of revolutionary transformation on an overly localized and regional point of view, we aim to show how it is only by defending/ beginning with the *particular* (or, minor) as instantiated in the individuals who belong to the marginalized sections of the global population that one can overcome the errors and blindspots of Holland's position as well as understand why our criticism gives rise to a *philosophically decolonized* Deleuze. And is it not already the case that Deleuze and Guattari, in their discourse regarding the potential of a becoming-minoritarian in politics, begin this process of philosophically *decolonizing* Thought? And is this decolonial element not already evident to familiar readers? For what else could we understand when, in the midst of their discussion of the minor's relationship with the capitalist-State, Deleuze and Guattari write,

Nonwhites would receive no adequate expression by becoming a new yellow or black majority, an infinite denumerable set. What is proper to the minority is to assert a power of the non-denumerable, even if that minority is composed of a single member. That is the formula for multiplicities. Minority as a universal figure, or becoming-everybody/everything (*devenir tout le monde*). Woman: we all have to become that, whether we are male or female. Non-white: we all have to become that, whether we are white, yellow, or black [...] However modest the demand, it always constitutes a point that the axiomatic cannot tolerate: when people demand to formulate their problems themselves, and to determine at least the particular conditions under which they can receive a more general solution (hold to the *Particular* as an innovative form). It is always astounding to see the same story repeated: the modest of the minorities' initial demands, coupled with the impotence of the axiomatic to resolve the slightest corresponding problem. In short, the struggle around axioms is most important when it manifests, itself opens, the gap between two types of propositions, propositions of flow and propositions of axioms. The power of the minorities is not measured by their capacity to enter and make themselves felt within the majority system...but to bring to bear the force of the non-denumerable set...against the denumerable sets. (*ATP*, 471)

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META

- CONTACT
- FORCE-INC/MILLE PLATEAUX
- IMPRESSUM
- DATENSCHUTZERKLÄRUNG

TAXONOMY

- CATEGORIES
- TAGS
- AUTHORS
- ALL INPUT

SOCIAL

- FACEBOOK
- INSTAGRAM
- TWITTER